

Unit Two

How Communities and States Deal with Emergencies and Disasters

During a flood such as Centerville's, many important activities must happen quickly and efficiently. Among these are rescue, caring for the injured, keeping people away from dangerous areas, assessing the situation to see what help is needed, and opening shelters for people displaced from their homes. As all this is occurring, phones are swamped with people asking for information. Without a good plan for such a situation, there would be no hope of getting the job done effectively.

In this unit, you will learn about:

- ◆ Local and State response activities.
- ◆ Local and State activities during the period following an emergency or disaster.
- ◆ The declaration of an emergency at the State and local level.
- ◆ Local and State actions that can assist in limiting future hazard risks.

Fortunately, many local areas and States have developed emergency operations plans that help them respond effectively. Their roles, as well as those of voluntary agencies whose invaluable efforts supplement theirs, are defined in these plans. When an emergency or disaster occurs, these plans are put into action to provide essential services to the community. The following information explains the types of activities performed by local government, State government, and voluntary agencies to deliver this assistance.

LOCAL RESPONSE AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

Local governments are the first line of defense against emergencies and disasters and are primarily responsible for managing the response to those events. At the local government level, the primary responsibility for protecting citizens belongs to local elected officials such as mayors, city councils, and boards of commissioners. When a local government receives warning that an emergency could be imminent, its first priority is to alert and warn citizens and take whatever actions are needed to minimize damage and protect life and



Since disasters often disrupt water supply lines, local governments must ensure that residents receive drinking water.

property. If necessary, it may order an evacuation. When an emergency or disaster does occur, fire and police units, emergency medical personnel, and rescue workers rush to damaged areas to provide aid. After this initial response, the local government must work to ensure public order and security. Vital services such as water, power, communications, transportation, shelter, and medical care must be provided, and debris removal must begin. Public and private utility company crews, along with other

emergency teams, must be on the job to restore essential services. The local government coordinates its efforts with voluntary agencies who assist individuals and families in need.

When a local government responds to an emergency, the level of the response and the type of resources required are determined by several factors:

- ◆ The speed of onset of the emergency.
- ◆ The potential need for evacuation.
- ◆ The magnitude of the situation.
- ◆ The projected duration of the event.
- ◆ The extent of the threat to citizens.

In an emergency, local government is responsible for responding to the event in a way that will contain the emergency, protect people and property, meet basic human needs (food, water, shelter, medical care), and minimize damage, as well as for overall management and coordination of an effective response.

Short-Term and Long-Term Recovery

In the aftermath of an emergency or disaster, many citizens will have specific needs that must be met before they can pick up the thread of their pre-disaster lives. Typically, there will be a need for services such as these:

- ◆ Assessment of the extent and severity of damages to homes and other property.
- ◆ Restoration of services generally available in communities—water, food, and medical assistance.
- ◆ Repair of damaged homes and property.
- ◆ Professional counseling when the sudden changes resulting from the emergency have resulted in mental anguish and the inability to cope.

Local governments help individuals and families recover by ensuring that these services are available and by seeking additional resources if the community needs them. Also, when an emergency occurs, the local government uses all available media to publicize the types of assistance available and how to access them.

Recovery occurs in two phases—short-term and long-term. *Short-term recovery* measures are those that are intended to return the community to minimum operating standards. *Long-term recovery* are those steps taken to return to

previous conditions (to the extent possible), combined with improvements that will better protect the community from future disasters. Each phase marks a transition that will enable the community to return to normal and create a safer condition for the future.



Following a disaster, repairing major roads is a high priority among short-term recovery tasks.

Short-term recovery could include making houses habitable so that families can move out of temporary shelters and return to their own homes. Short-term recovery also could involve restoring essential services so people can return to work. At the community level, this part of recovery may require completing repairs to roads and bridges so traffic can start moving again or restoring water and power to areas in need, especially to important public structures such as hospitals and major places of employment. In Centerville, for example, short-term recovery would include all of these

activities, with priority given to restoring services in public structures and major places of employment. The restoration of major roads will be given priority to help people return to their homes and work safely; many minor routes may have to wait for repairs.

Long-term recovery may occur over a period of months or years, depending on the severity of the emergency or disaster. It often involves extensive repair and rebuilding. The disruption and destruction to the community can be so great that some businesses may never reopen or may have to relocate. Although a community may appear to be “open for business” a few weeks after an emergency or disaster, it may be years after a severe disaster before the community returns to pre-disaster conditions.

As part of the recovery, communities should consider strategies that would lessen the effects of a similar event in the future. These strategies, called mitigation measures, may have helped lessen the effects in the Centerville flood scenario. During the rebuilding process, residents could raise their furnaces to higher floors, business owners could consider storing inventory in areas above the flood level, and hospitals could elevate and move generators and other critical facilities to protected buildings. In the case of severe and repeated flood damage, residents might consider relocating damaged structures to a safer area. The community of Centerville could begin enforcing more stringent building codes and floodplain ordinances that help structures withstand flooding.

In addition to the self-help efforts of individuals and families and the efforts of local governments in emergencies, voluntary agencies are a central part of the effective response to, and recovery from, an emergency.

The Role of Voluntary Agencies

When most Americans think about disasters, they picture volunteers from agencies such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army providing a helping hand to the victims. Voluntary agencies are an essential part of any disaster relief effort, providing critical assistance with food, shelter, clothing, household items, medical expenses, clean-up, repairs, and rebuilding. These agencies are typically involved in all the phases of emergency management (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery).

Some voluntary agencies are available to respond to emergencies in all communities; others may respond only to disasters that affect specific regional areas. Voluntary agencies respond whether or not there is a Presidential declaration, coordinating with each other and with government officials to meet a community's disaster needs.



In a flood such as Centerville's, the state might be asked to help rescue stranded people and farm animals.

See Appendix B, page A-2, for a list of voluntary agencies that are active in disasters and the services they provide.

Requesting State Assistance

If the situation warrants, the community may have to reach beyond its own boundaries for additional resources. Mutual aid agreements should already be in place to facilitate

provision of assistance by neighboring jurisdictions. In our flood scenario, however, these agreements will not result in significant added resources because other communities are also overwhelmed.

In such a case, the local government would have to appeal to the State for assistance. Centerville would seek assistance in transportation and rescue, for example. Local officials will submit a request to the Governor providing specific information about the situation and its effects and specifying the type of assistance needed. The State emergency management office and other offices involved in providing disaster assistance carefully assess this request and advise the Governor on appropriate actions.

Periodically, local officials send reports to the State that convey important information about the types and levels of assistance that might be required to assist the people in the impacted area. A typical situation report would contain information about the magnitude and severity of damages associated with the disaster event. Deaths, injuries, property damages, and locations in which losses occurred would be described. As additional information becomes available, updated reports are provided.

Generally, State emergency officials work very closely with local officials to ensure that required documentation is included in situation reports. If a request were to be made subsequently for a Presidential declaration (as will be explained in a later unit), the information contained in these reports would be of critical importance. The documentation of the local government's level of effort in responding to the event and the location of areas of damage are especially important.

STATE RESPONSE AND RECOVERY ACTIVITIES

All states have laws that describe the responsibilities of State government in emergencies and disasters. These laws provide governors and State agencies with the authority to plan for and carry out the necessary actions to respond to emergencies and recover from their effects. Typically, State emergency management legislation describes the duties and powers of the Governor, whose authority typically includes the power to declare a state of emergency and to decide when to terminate this declaration.

Many of the specific responsibilities to carry out the provisions of the State emergency management legislation are generally delegated to the State emergency management organization. Virtually all States have emergency management organizations, although their name and structure may vary from State to State. Typical names include office of emergency services or division of emergency management. Regardless of the title or location of the emergency management organization in the structure of the State government, its responsibilities are the same—to prepare for emergencies and to coordinate the activation and use of the resources controlled by the State government when they are needed to help local governments respond to, and recover from, emergencies and disasters.

The State emergency management organization, in its coordinating role, is involved in virtually all serious emergencies or disasters. Typically, this organization is responsible for receiving reports from the local area. Based on these and other data, emergency management officials work in consultation



A governor may declare a state emergency in order to facilitate the deployment of State resources to a disaster area.

with other agency representatives and members of the Governor's staff to determine what types of resources and personnel should be deployed to the impacted area. Using procedures specified in the State plan, the State emergency management organization will coordinate deployment of State personnel and resources to the impacted areas.

However, it is not necessary for a Governor to declare an emergency or disaster before agency personnel and resources are deployed to monitor

situations and provide information. Personnel and equipment are typically used to monitor situations in which an area's water supply may become contaminated or when large-scale chemical leakage is possible. State agency personnel would generally be involved in early inspection activities and in making reports back to the emergency management office and their own agencies for the purpose of determining additional assistance that may be needed.

When an emergency is declared, the Governor (or emergency management agency official acting for the Governor) can mobilize resources to supplement their own supplies, equipment, and personnel. In a situation like that of Centerville, for example, in which large populated areas are threatened by the continued rise in floodwaters, the State could assist in evacuation of the threatened area by prescribing evacuation routes and helping to control entries and departures from the disaster area.

State and local government also may regulate the movement of persons inside the affected area; persons can be prevented from returning to buildings rendered uninhabitable or unsafe by the disaster itself. The exercise of these powers could become necessary not only to protect the residents of the affected community but also to make the work of the emergency response personnel safer and more efficient.

In many States, governors can suspend State laws or local ordinances if it is determined that the law in question will restrict or prohibit efforts to relieve human suffering caused by the situation. In some States, after a State emergency declaration, the Governor may establish economic control over resources and services such as food, wages, clothing, and shelter in the affected area.



Under a State emergency declaration, governors typically are empowered to mobilize the National Guard and direct its efforts. Generally, they are granted the power to use all available State resources needed to respond effectively and efficiently to the event. The Governor is able to draw upon the resources, expertise, and knowledge of State agencies as needed to assist in the effort. In many disasters, the States can provide technical assistance and resources that would not be available to most local officials within their own communities.

Under a State emergency declaration, governors typically are empowered to mobilize the National Guard and direct its efforts.

An affected State also is able to request mutual aid from other States. Though the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) or a similar arrangement, participating States agree to provide personnel, equipment, and supplies to another State in need. Mutual aid enables States to draw upon a common pool of resources with minimal Federal involvement.

Under a State emergency declaration, the Governor may also have the power to use or commandeer private property for the purpose of responding to the disaster. Emergency management acts generally grant the Governor the power

to use, or authorize the use of, contingency and emergency funds in the event of an emergency. In some States, the Governor also may reallocate funds when designated funds are exhausted.

Types of Assistance Provided

Typically, there are two types of State response assistance.

- ◆ State personnel and resources can be activated and deployed to assist in the response effort directly (or to manage it, in some instances).



State officials may inspect structures such as dams, levees, and bridges to determine whether repairs are needed.

Examples of this type of activity include evacuation management, securing the affected area, and search and rescue.

- ◆ State personnel and equipment can be deployed to perform a variety of monitoring and inspection activities that can ensure the safety of inhabitants and response personnel in the area.

Examples of these types of activities include the use of officials to monitor threats of chemical and other fires or to monitor the water supply and ensure its continued safety. State officials may periodically inspect structures such as dams, levees, and bridges to monitor their condition and determine whether they are safe for continued use.

If necessary, the State may undertake emergency repairs (such as to restore bridges that are part of an essential route).

State assistance to communities is provided by many different State agencies. Typical services provided by some key agencies are described below.

Department of Public Safety

In many major floods—such as the one depicted in the scenario—bridges often are damaged, and very heavy debris may clog up the river, creating a more serious threat to surrounding areas. Heavy cranes and other equipment, along with the expertise and skill needed to use the equipment, can often be provided by State transportation or highway agencies. Engineers employed by transportation departments also have the knowledge and skills to conduct accurate damage assessments of bridges and other structures. In addition, they can suggest mitigation methods so that reconstruction includes added protection for future disasters.



State public safety officials may assist in search and rescue operations.

State public safety personnel can assist in law enforcement for disaster areas, traffic control (especially in evacuation and for incoming assistance), security (such as to protect evacuated homes and businesses from looting and further damage), and search and rescue. The fire marshal's office can deploy personnel to investigate structural fires and to assist in assessing the safety of structures that may be at risk from fires.

Public health units within the public safety department often must perform tasks such as water supply monitoring, food supply inspection, and communicable disease control. State specialists also may assist in documenting (videotaping) damage.

Social Service Agencies

State social service agencies can provide or fund personnel and resources to assist in the management of shelters and to provide assistance to individuals and families. This can include counseling to alleviate stress, which, experience has demonstrated, must be handled appropriately in the early phases of a disaster to minimize later negative effects of the experience. If there is a Presidential declaration, these are usually the agencies that provide administrative services to manage the Individual and Family Grant Program. These agencies also are usually assigned to assist voluntary agencies such as the American Red Cross in their efforts to provide relief to disaster victims.

The National Guard

In a flood as serious as the one described in the scenario, the State National Guard could send personnel who could be assigned a wide range of duties. They would assist in flood-fighting activities such as sandbagging, evacuation, and search and rescue. The National Guard is frequently assigned to maintain order and civil control and to provide supplemental law enforcement and fire suppression assistance.

The National Guard units also have other valuable resources and equipment that can be used: trucks, helicopters, heavy tools and equipment, portable medical facilities, mobile kitchens, and communications equipment.

Public Health Agencies

State public health agencies perform several important functions in response and recovery. These agencies can make available: physicians, nurses, epidemiologists, medical technicians, and others. Equipment and facilities also are provided.

Monitoring water supplies, inspecting food supplies, controlling communicable diseases, providing and allocating medication in disaster-impacted areas, monitoring health care facilities, and identifying victims are among the more important response and short-term recovery activities that can be provided by, or coordinated through, State public health agencies.



State natural resource agencies may be able to contribute expertise when natural resources are threatened by fire.

Department of Agriculture

The State's department of agriculture will generally assist when damage to farms and ranches is involved. It often carries out measures to protect the long-term food supply of the affected area. State agriculture departments also inventory food resources and may help procure food for disaster victims. Longer term assistance provided by agriculture departments includes advising farmers and agribusinesses in mitigation planning and recovering from damages to facilities, crops, and livestock.

Natural Resource Agencies

Natural resource agencies have several types of expertise useful to an effective response, including fire suppression and the protection of fish and game resources. Natural resource agencies may have personnel available to assist in conducting damage assessments. Also, these agencies advise local officials and help them monitor and protect natural resources such as fish and game, as well as wildlands and other protected areas. Environmental protection agencies may assist in similar ways to help local officials preserve and protect various environmentally sensitive areas and to plan mitigation measures for further

disasters. They can also provide technical expertise to help agencies respond appropriately to hazardous materials spills that could result from primary events such as floods.

Other Resources

Other State agencies have resources and expertise helpful to local communities stricken by disaster. For example, labor departments can assist with immediate safety inspections. Education departments can help maintain education services. State management and budget agencies can assist in locating and establishing recovery centers and field operations offices.

Depending upon the severity of the disaster and the damages, some agencies—such as offices of management and budget, labor, employment security, commerce, and treasury—become more substantially involved in providing assistance for the community’s recovery. For example, treasury departments can conduct post-emergency audits to document expenditures by local governments. In some States, they also provide tax advice for disaster victims.

Some State general services agencies can help identify and make available State facilities and related equipment to be used for shelter, as well as for the warehousing of food supplies or other resources.

In most States, commerce departments assist in licensing motor carriers and other vehicles needed to transport supplies. They also work to expedite and prioritize the recovery of utilities to the affected areas. Personnel from these agencies also may be involved in damage assessment work.

Finally, a key activity of State emergency offices is to review and critique the State’s effort, with the objective of strengthening the State’s response in the event of another disaster.

THE ROLE OF PLANNING IN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

The ability of communities and States to respond effectively to disasters depends largely on actions taken before the disaster. Communities and States should develop both response and hazard mitigation plans. Officials plan what roles different organizations would have in a disaster and how they would coordinate with each other to avoid duplication of benefits or confusion.

Response Planning

The community's ability to respond to an emergency begins with the development of a local emergency operations plan.

TERM TO REMEMBER

Emergency Operations Plan or Emergency Response Plan

A document that contains information on the actions that may be taken by a governmental jurisdiction to protect people and property before, during, and after a disaster.

Each community's plan may include a list of resources the community would use for various types of emergencies. In a flood such as Centerville's, for example, the local government will contact technical experts who can assess the condition of the flood protection structures and analyze the implications of their condition for flood control. The community's advance planning should also identify what routes could be used to evacuate people quickly in the event of a disaster. In Centerville's case, since the area has always been vulnerable to flooding, these would be pre-selected to facilitate movement. Shelter locations would also be identified as a preparedness measure.

The plan also establishes ways to notify the public in the event of an emergency. In our scenario, electric power was lost in Centerville, so many people could not get information either by phone or by television. The area did not have a siren warning system, and evacuation routes were not generally familiar to the public. As a result, the only means of reaching many people was through broadcasts that could be received only on battery-operated radios or by traveling to their neighborhoods.



Community plans should specify sources for the heavy equipment needed for debris removal.

Where did Centerville get the boats it used to rescue its citizens? Unless the town had worked out an advance agreement with possible sources, it lost valuable time trying to make the necessary arrangements at the time of immediate need. In addition to making arrangements with private sources to borrow resources (such as heavy equipment that may be needed for debris removal), communities may also have mutual aid agreements in place with adjacent communities to facilitate requests for assistance.

In addition to providing policies, procedures, and an emergency organization structure, the plan contains information on the specific emergency conditions under which the plan will be activated. If the conditions warrant, local authorities may declare an emergency. The legal basis for a local state-of-emergency declaration

typically is a local ordinance that stipulates who has the authority to declare a state of emergency and under what conditions this can be done. Documentation provided in the plan gives local governments a solid legal foundation for any subsequent request for State and Federal emergency assistance and eliminates any confusion about the degree of impact the event has had on the community. Communities that formulate sound plans, establish appropriate emergency-related policies, and test their plans through regularly scheduled exercises will be prepared to assist citizens if an emergency occurs.

State governments also must document their plans for emergency response. The typical State plan is similar in structure and organization to most emergency operations plans developed by local governments. State and local plans should be coordinated to ensure that procedures for providing assistance result in an effective combined effort.

State and Local Hazard Mitigation Planning

The Stafford Act requires that the recipients of disaster assistance make every effort to mitigate the natural hazards in the area. To comply with this provision, State and local governments must prepare and implement a hazard mitigation plan outlining cost-effective strategies to reduce vulnerability to specific hazards. Through the plan, State and local government can:

- ◆ Evaluate the hazards in the disaster area.
- ◆ Identify appropriate actions to mitigate vulnerability to these hazards.

The Stafford Act specifically encourages regulation of land use and protective construction standards as part of a long-term, comprehensive approach to mitigation. The President is also authorized to prescribe hazard mitigation standards and approve such standards proposed by State and local governments. Disaster assistance can be made conditional upon a recipient's agreement to develop a long-term strategy and program that will reduce or eliminate the need for future Federal disaster assistance should a similar event recur.

REQUESTING FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

What if the available resources and personnel of both the local and State governments are inadequate to meet the response and recovery needs created by the disaster? The local government or State officials may at any time request assistance directly from a number of Federal agencies, most of which can provide some form of direct assistance without a Presidential declaration. When a disaster situation is beyond the capabilities of local and State resources, even as supplemented by private and voluntary agencies and by direct assistance from Federal agencies, the Governor may ask the President to declare a major disaster. If granted, supplemental disaster assistance is made available to help individuals, families, and the community.

EARLY IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR HAZARD MITIGATION

After a Presidential disaster declaration, FEMA works with the State to develop an Early Implementation Strategy. The strategy outlines activities to help reduce future damages based on damages assessed in the current disaster. This ensures that communities, States, and individuals consider ways to reduce potential damages from the next disaster as they make repairs now.

In the next unit, you will learn about Federal assistance and the conditions under which it is made available.

SUMMARY

Local governments are the first line of defense against emergencies. When needed, they serve as the link between individuals and the emergency response and recovery efforts carried out by State and Federal government.

Response involves immediate actions to save lives, protect property, and meet basic human needs. Short-term recovery generally involves temporary measures to restore essential services and get the community going again. Long-term recovery involves permanent restoration, including steps to provide greater safety for the future. Local ordinances and emergency operations plans are the basis for the local response effort. Voluntary agencies are an integral part of the community response effort.

The local government requests State assistance when it is needed. The State uses local reports describing damages incurred and local actions taken to determine how to best direct its resources.

If the State's resources are also overwhelmed, the Governor may request specific types of assistance from the Federal government. ◆

CHECK YOUR MEMORY

(Answers on page K-1)

1. To protect citizens in an emergency, local government _____.
 - a. Activates its local emergency operations plan.
 - b. Warns citizens.
 - c. Reports to State officials.
 - d. All of the above.
2. Large-scale restoration and replacement of buildings or roads are _____ activities.
 - a. Short-term recovery.
 - b. Long-term recovery.
3. Situation reports are used to _____.
 - a. Monitor local response.
 - b. Evaluate the extent of damage.
 - c. Identify needed assistance.
 - d. All of the above.
4. During an emergency or disaster, the Governor may be authorized to _____.
 - a. Activate Federal assistance.
 - b. Mobilize State agency resources.
 - c. Appropriate private resources.
 - d. Both b and c.
5. The State National Guard could assist communities in _____.
 - a. Food supply inspection.
 - b. Maintaining order.
 - c. Counseling.
 - d. Advising farmers on damage recovery.

6. After a disaster happens, there is no point doing anything to reduce the damages that might occur next time.
 - a. True
 - b. False